

I have come to the floor this afternoon. While the GAO decision is important, it won't even come close to addressing all of the questions that have been raised about this contract. That is because the GAO's role in this process is very limited. It can examine whether the Air Force followed the letter of the law in the selection process, but it cannot look at anything beyond that. So even if it is obvious to them that the Airbus tanker costs more, that it is less safe, or it doesn't meet the Air Force's needs, the GAO can't take any action. That is our job. That is Congress's job. We have to get answers to the questions that have been raised about this deal.

This is one of the largest contracts in our history, and it is incredibly important. Our tankers refuel planes and aircraft from every single branch of our military. As long as we control that refueling technology, we control our skies and our security, and that is extremely important to our national security. We have to make sure we are making the best decision for our taxpayers and for our servicemembers. That is Congress's responsibility.

I am especially concerned because when you compare Boeing's 767 with Airbus's A-330, the 767 is clearly a better plane. Compared to the 767, the Airbus tanker is a lot larger, it is less efficient, and it is more expensive to operate. According to the Air Force itself, the A-330—the Airbus tanker—ranked lower than the Boeing 767 in survivability, which is our ability to make sure that our warfighters who are flying those planes are safe. The Airbus tanker ranked much lower than the Boeing plane in keeping our men and women who are flying them safe.

Yet although I have asked the Air Force to explain its decision on this tanker numerous times over the last 3 months, I have been stonewalled again and again on answers. No one has explained why the Air Force would ask for a medium-sized plane and then go out and choose a much larger design which is going to cost billions of dollars more in just fuel and maintenance.

No one has explained why we would buy a plane that is so big that we are going to have to rip out and replace hundreds of runways, ramps, and hangars around the globe in order to land that plane.

No one has explained why we would not buy the safest possible airplane for our servicemembers.

Perhaps most importantly, no one can explain why we are giving a multi-billion-dollar contract to a company that has made no secret of its desire to dismantle our U.S. aerospace industry.

For years, the foreign governments that own Airbus have flooded it with illegal subsidies in order to compete with Boeing. In fact, the A-330 is a result of that subsidized system. The U.S. Trade Representative is so concerned that our Government has accused the EU of unfair trade practices before the World Trade Organization. It

makes absolutely no sense to me that we would accuse Europe of illegally subsidizing Airbus and then turn around and award it a \$35 billion contract of U.S. taxpayer money. It is especially troubling because the consequences to our national security and our economy will be huge.

A report by the nonpartisan Economic Policy Institute shows that Boeing would create at least twice as many American jobs as Airbus. In other words, we stand to lose as many as 14,000 jobs right here in the United States by sending this contract to Airbus. With those jobs that we lose, we lose the knowledge and we lose the expertise that helped us create our global military strength and has made the United States the world leader in aerospace technology. Yet no one has explained why we would let that slip away.

Not only am I very troubled that I haven't been able to get answers to these questions, but this month the Air Force gave us new reason to be concerned. About 2 weeks ago, the Defense Secretary forced out the Air Force Secretary, Michael Wynne, and its Chief of Staff, Michael Moseley, after finding systemic problems in the service that led him to have a serious lack of confidence in their leadership and in their oversight. Mr. Wynne and General Moseley blessed this Airbus contract. Clearly, we in Congress—those who represent the taxpayers of this country—need to look at this deal more closely.

Congress is entrusted by the American people with the responsibility to look out for our taxpayers and to be a check on this administration or any administration. When it is clear that the administration has gone in the wrong direction, we—Congress—have to step in. Now is one of those times. We owe it to our taxpayers and to our service men and women to make sure we buy the right plane. This contract is too important.

So I am here this afternoon on the floor of the Senate to implore my colleagues to stand with me and continue to demand that the Air Force justify this decision.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LAUTENBERG). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I congratulate the Vermont State Housing Authority, VSHA, on 40 years of excellence. This organization, which came into existence with a creative spark as the first statewide housing authority in the country, continues to find new and innovative ways to use Federal housing programs to find affordable homes for Vermonters.

Reaching this milestone should bring great pride to the visionaries that created the system in 1968, including Governor Phil Hoff, and to the 40 years of staff, board members and leaders that have ensured that the statewide mission of VSHA has been carried out on a daily basis.

The VSHA executive director, Richard Williams, has been at the helm of the VSHA for more than half its lifespan, working since 1984 to expand the reach of the organization, develop and maintain properties and move people out of the cold and into their own homes. It takes a man of great conviction to accomplish what he has done, and it takes a great team to deliver on the mission he and the board created. Richard was recently quoted saying, "We are proud of what we've been able to accomplish for Vermonters over the past 40 years, but the challenges have never been greater. We're inspired and motivated by the knowledge that our services are needed more than ever."

One of VSHA's primary responsibilities is administering the Department of Housing and Urban Development's, HUD, Section 8 Voucher Program in Vermont. During the past 40 years, the VSHA has worked to increase the number of vouchers available to Vermonters in all corners of the State. This has been increasingly important as the Federal resources for the programs many of our Nation's most vulnerable populations depend upon have been shrinking and poorly prioritized. The number of low- to moderate-income Vermonters seeking affordable housing, including those with disabilities, the elderly and returning veterans, continues to climb. Fortunately for Vermonters, the VSHA is constantly recognized by HUD as one of the Nation's most well run and effective housing authorities—giving hope to those that might have lost hope in virtually every other government system.

Not only has the VSHA worked to assist people in finding affordable apartments, but they have also helped many Vermonters pursue their dreams of homeownership. It gives me great pride to say that VSHA's Homeownership program has given more than 80 low-income Vermont families the opportunity to become homeowners. This dynamic program works to improve self-sufficiency by converting Section 8